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SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR WHA/BSC AND ISN/WMDT
DEPT FOR DS/CC AND DS/IP/WHA
DOE FOR NNSA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ENRG](#) [IAEA](#) [KNNP](#) [KCSA](#) [TRGY](#) [ASEC](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINE FEDERAL POLICE RECOVERS CESIUM 137
CONTAINER UNOPENED AND MAKES AND ARREST

REF: A. A) BUENOS AIRES 00183
[1](#)B. B) BUENOS AIRES 00173

[1](#)1. (SBU) In the evening of February 20, Argentine Federal Police recovered the stolen container of cesium 137 unopened and made an arrest in connection with the case (reftels). A very senior police official reported to RSO that the tracking of an extortion call made earlier in the day had allowed investigators to narrow down their search to a small area in Neuquen City. The NRA (nuclear regulatory agency) team in Neuquen reportedly used a radiological scanner to pinpoint to a couple of houses, which were then placed under surveillance.

[1](#)2. (SBU) According to this senior official, the police were in the process of obtaining a search warrant when a taxi pulled up to one of the houses and a ramp was placed to access the back of the vehicle. An individual was arrested as he was rolling the container onto the trunk of the vehicle. The arrest was made possible by the fact that the handling was occurring on a public street. The arrested individual was a former employee of Baker Atlas. The investigation continues to identify other individuals involved in the case. The police confirm that the container was never opened and that there were no radioactive leaks.

[1](#)3. (U) The national press still has not picked up on this dramatic capture, though the Neuquen local newspaper reported the story today and gave additional details about the arrest. According to the newspaper article, specialists contracted by Baker Atlas assisted the ARN in tracking down the nuclear source. The article can be found at www.lmneuquen.com.ar/noticias/2009/2/21/19560 .php.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Comment: The quick and successful resolution of the theft of nuclear material highlights excellent combined work between the police and the NRA, using a combination of tools involving the tracing of a call and the use of nuclear detection scanners. The GOA took this incident very seriously and deployed all of the means at its disposal to recover the stolen nuclear material within two days. The work of this combined inter-agency task force is also evidence that the GOA has put to good use the training, equipment and nuclear emergency response center provided by the USG. End Comment
KELLY